

Home Rule for Ireland

Extract of a Speech made before the Legislative Assembly of the
Province of Quebec, on the 16th of April, 1886

BY THE

HON. E. J. FLYNN

Edmund James

(Note by the Translator.)

The circumstances under which this one, of the Hon. E. J. Flynn's most brilliant efforts was made, are as follows:

The Hon. Mr. Gladstone had placed before the Imperial Parliament a measure for the purpose of granting self-government to Ireland.

With the object of strengthening Mr. Gladstone's hands and showing to the British Parliament and to the British people the state of opinion in this Province, a motion was made before our Local Legislature, here,

in favor of an address of congratulations to Mr. Gladstone.

This motion met with great opposition and it is well known its passage was largely due to the impression produced by Mr. Flynn's speech, a few extracts of which have been translated and are given below.

It was an open secret at that time that the Hon. Gentleman had declared his intention of resigning his portfolio unless the Government supported the motion.

Thanks to the Hon. Gentleman's eloquent Pleading and decided action, the motion before the House was carried.

After some preliminary remarks the Hon. Member said :

This Legislature is now called upon to state whether it approves the adoption of measures to improve the position of Ireland.

The people of this Province rejoiced at the news that the first Minister of the Empire had proposed a law granting to Ireland the benefit of self-government.

All our sympathies as a people were in favor of all measures tending to improve the unfortunate position of Ireland. We have in this Province of Quebec a population composed of Frenchmen, Englishmen, Scotchmen and Irishmen. There is hardly a spot in the whole of our country

where Irishmen are not to be found. I myself, whilst visiting remote parts of our Province, have seen more than once a spectacle which has deeply moved me : I have seen groups of Irishmen born upon Irish soil or descendants of Irishmen who without losing the memory of the land of their birth or that of their ancestors, were living in peace and harmony with their Canadian fellow citizens and I can say that the Irish population of this Province is hand in hand with their fellow citizens of French extraction and deserves the sympathies of all the nationalities which form the Canadian People.

(After some remarks the speaker continues.)

Mr. President, what is the true reason of all these troubles which agitate Ireland and find expression in public manifestations throughout the whole of the United Empire, if not that the English People have failed to recognize the National aspirations of Irishmen ?

Sir, to bring back peace and tranquillity to Ireland, three things are needed. Ireland must have a strong Government ; it must have a just Government, but above all things Ireland must have a National Government : A strong Government which will not fear to do its duty under all circumstances ; a Government that will be just to all whilst its strength will entitle it to respect : a National Government that will rest its first claims upon the sympathies of the people whose affairs it will administer and to whose aspirations it will give free scope and opportunity.

Does the past history of Ireland show that England has ever understood or desired to understand the necessity of adopting the above solution of the Irish problem ? No

Sir, the Statemen of England have never understood that the People of Ireland were to be governed, not by sword or cannon, but by justice and clemency alone.

In support of my remarks allow me, Sir, to read a short extract of a work on Ireland. Speaking of Ireland's wants the author says :

“ But, in addition to this, it appears to me to be perfectly evident from the existing state of public opinion in Ireland, that no government will ever command the real affection and loyalty of the people which is not in some degree national, administered in great measure by Irishmen and through Irish institutions. If the present discontent is ever to be checked, if the ruling power is ever to carry with it the moral weight which is essential to its success, it can only be by calling into being a strong local political feeling, directed by men who have the responsibility of property, who are attached to the connection, and who at the same time, possess the confidence of the Irish people. As in Hungary, as in Poland, as in Belgium, national institutions alone will obtain the confidence of the nation, and any system of policy which fails to recognise this crowning of the national sentiment will fail also to strike a chord of true gratitude. It may palliate, but it may not cure. It may deal with local symptoms, but it cannot remove the chronic disease. To call into active political life the upper class of Irishmen, and to enlarge the sphere of their political power—to give, in a word, to Ireland the greatest amount of self government that is compatible with the unity and security of the Empire—should be the aim of every statesman.”

Mr. President, these words were written in 1872, and at

even at that date this writer had perceived what was required to give peace and prosperity to Ireland.

As far back as in 1872 an English author did not hesitate to declare that the great problem of the Government of Ireland could be solved in one manner only : by the recognition of the Irish Nationality. Public opinion in England has advanced with great strides since then and the best proof of this is to be found in the present course of the Hon. Mr. Gladstone.

By the proposal which is in your hands, Mr. Speaker, we are asked for an expression of opinion on the measure submitted to the Imperial Parliament by Mr. Gladstone.

I am not thoroughly familiar with the said measure, but I see that it has been cordially received. In this matter the party most interested is the Irish people and their representatives. It is for them to state their wants. Now this measure has the sanction and the approval of the Great Irish Chieftain himself.

As for myself I have no hesitation to state that if the Irish Chieftain and his supporters are willing to accept this measure, I fail to see on our side any serious objection to the expression of our sympathy for the Irish People, especially at this moment the most solemn of their History, when the voice of humanity seems raised to demand that Justice should be rendered to them.

I believe that we may state that we are pleased with the prospects of Heroic Ireland. We can in consequence offer our congratulations to the Honorable Mr. Gladstone.

It has been stated, Sir, that the Unity of the Empire

would be destroyed were this measure adopted. I am not of that opinion.

English Statemen have come to the conclusion that far from being a cause of weakness, this measure, which throws off the chains which during three centuries weighed upon the Irish people and gives to that country the right of self-government, will draw closer the bonds which unite the different parts of the Empire and thus add to its security.

Mr. Gladstone has recognized this more than once and has urged the necessity of applying a strong remedy to the evil. He has shewn that he desired to liberate the Irish people from their bondage.

Before saying an eternal farewell to the things of this world, he desired to free a nation, and at the same time to show to the English people, the proudest nation in the world, that their Policy in Ireland was both unjust and wrong.

To day we are called upon to adopt an address of congratulations to Mr. Gladstone for having presented a project of Home Rule for Ireland to the Imperial Parliament and thus to express our opinion on a question which interests not only the United Empire but I might say the whole world.

I think we have the right to express such an opinion : we are the authorized representatives of a people, a large number of whom await with impatience the news of the liberation of their country. I say then that this power of

expressing an opinion is ours and that we can use it in the name of those whom we represent here.

Mr. President, I will conclude these remarks by stating : That if the English nation grants this measure of justice to the people of Ireland, then that British Empire, over which it is said the sun never sets, will thereby attain additional lustre and renown.